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ABSTRACT

The methodology developed for use in a U.S.-sponsored radio-based English language arts program for grades 1-3 in Kenya, adapted to the special circumstances of the medium, the context, and the program's administrative limitations, is a highly interactive radio lesson whose most important organizational characteristics are adherence to distributed-learning principles in instructional design and the use of a semantically-based, functional-notional syllabus to organize the elements of instruction. The Radio Language Arts Program series of lessons uses direct-method language teaching principles, using post-audiolingual techniques, in particular cognitively-grounded pattern exercises, when appropriate and where the limitations of instructional broadcasting justify their use. The methodology and materials used reflect the program's philosophical orientation to generative-transformational language theory. (MSE)

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PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

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A LOOK AT METHODOLOGY

by
David Edgerton and Philip A.S. Sedlak

The Academy for Educational Development, Inc. (AED) is a nonprofit service organization active in many areas of education. Under contract to the Office of Education, Bureau for Science and Technology of the United States Agency for International Development (AID), the Academy is assisting the Kenyan Ministry of Basic Education through the Kenya Institute of Education to develop a radio-based English language arts program for grades one through three. The Radio Language Arts Project (RLAP) is a five-year project designed to develop, implement, and test the effectiveness of an instructional system which uses radio as the major medium of instruction. The end product will be a series of 585 taped lessons, appropriate student tests, teacher orientation materials, classroom observation and data-gathering procedures, and an evaluation of the project's effectiveness.

The purpose of this paper is to outline some of the methodological considerations that inform RLAP broadcasts and related materials. Many of our decisions about the instructional strategies used in RLAP broadcasts were influenced by three special considerations. The first of these was Kenya's particularly complex language environment. The second was the project's obligation to adhere to the Kenya public-school English curriculum and Kenya's school language policies. The third consideration was the special nature of radio itself as a device for presenting a course of language study.

The question of how best to teach English by radio is, in addition, among the project's principal methodological concerns. Our choices of techniques for use in RLAP radio classrooms were governed not simply by our views on instructional methodology, but by the potential effectiveness of each technique for presentation over the radio. Since our work may be of interest to a variety of specialists—broadcasters, instructional designers, and others—concerned with the development of ESL/EFL broadcast materials, we will provide an overview of language teaching methodology as part of this discussion. Those readers who are experienced language teachers may wish to skip this section and go directly to RLAP methodology.

A Look at Methodologies

In the past, four major approaches dominated language teaching: the grammar-translation method, the reading method, the direct method, and the audiolingual method.

In the oldest of these approaches, the **grammar-translation method**, teachers taught living languages as if they were teaching Latin or ancient Greek. Students were required to memorize complicated paradigms and rules, and practice was mainly a matter of translating passages from works of literature.

The **reading method** was in good part a reaction against the older grammar-translation method. Its main purpose, as its name implies, was to give students reading proficiency in a target language; but in the reading method, students were encouraged to apprehend meaning directly, without recourse to translation.

The **direct method** was originally an attempt to replicate the "natural" circumstances in which children learn their own native languages. In the direct method, the use of the learner's mother tongue is avoided. There is no explicit teaching of grammar. Translation is avoided as are reading and writing. Instead, students are encouraged to internalize grammar inductively, through intensive listening and speaking practice.

The **audiolingual method** is based on behaviorist theories of learning. According to audiolingualists, language is a set of speech "habits." Students acquire these habits, in audiolingual language teaching, through drills and exercises which illustrate grammatical patterns, and through memorized dialogues.

More recently a number of "new" methods have emerged. The **new methods** were developed in response to the attacks on the behaviorist theories of language learning. Although there is considerable variety among the post-audiolingual methods, they share two common elements: primary focus on the learner, and emphasis on language as communication.

The basic principles of the direct method remain alive and well in RLAP broadcasts, as they do in many language classrooms today. Teachers and theorists generally concur that the best way to teach a foreign language is the most direct way: by giving students intensive speaking and listening practice in natural, meaningful contexts, and by putting off cumbersome secondary tasks, such as translation exercises, until the advanced stages of study.

The audiolingual method, on the other hand, has suffered a sharp decline. The perception of language as a set of rote habits has yielded to the view that language is an aspect of creativity, and language teaching methodology has changed accordingly.

Patterned exercises, when they are used today, generally bear only the most superficial resemblances to the old audiolingual drills. Patterned practice in some form was probably never absent for long from language classrooms, even in the days when drilling of any kind was being condemned on all sides.

None of the new methods has aquired the unified following of those described above. In fact, there seems to be a general distrust by language teachers of any one method, largely because our understanding of language and language learning has been broadened by recent developments in three fields: generative-transformal linguistics, sociolinguistics, and second-language learning theory.

Generative-transformal linguistics is founded on the work of Noam Chomsky. According to Chomsky, language is innate. Chomsky contends that people are born with much of the rule-centered machinery of language already

in their brains, and that the knowledge of any given language is simply an overlay, with this innate and universal language "template" underneath it. Generative-transformal linguists give much importance to the role of intuition in language use. Intuition, in this sense, refers to the ability of native speakers to know without conscious intellection such things as which sounds are part of their language and which are not; and, more important, to know how to generate from a finite set of rules an unlimited number of sentences never spoken before, and to understand sentences never heard before.

Sociolinguistics brought aspects of both sociology and anthropology to bear on language teaching. It was the sociolinguists who persuaded teachers and methodologists to examine carefully the kinds of language and language skills they were presenting to learners, and to insure that the language variety being taught was appropriate to the contexts in which learners would use it.

Second-language learning theorists hold that the process of second-language learning is different enough from a child's first-language acquisition to warrant an autonomous theory. The result has been a marked increase in work on the special needs of different ages and categories of language learners—children, older learners, illiterate learners, and so on.

As a result of this abundance of recent innovation in linguistic theory and language-teaching methodology, eclecticism is one of the principal characteristics of contemporary language teaching. Many language curricula in current use consist of broad-based mixtures of techniques. The abundance of available methodologies means that educators are able to design case-specific mixtures of teaching methods to address the needs of many different kinds of learners, in many different instructional situations.

Perhaps the other single most important feature of contemporary language-teaching is the centrality of meaning and context in classroom practice. Most language-teaching methods in use today aim hard at putting the learner and the material for practice in the context of actual, plausible conversational speech. Language teachers generally agree that language drills and exercises, of whatever kind, ought to spring from some clear, predictable context for communication.

RLAP Methodology: The Interactive Radio Lesson

RLAP broadcasts are designed to help learners keep the meaning of words and structures they are practicing firmly in mind as the lesson proceeds. This is accomplished in several ways:

- through modeling and demonstration activities carried out by students in the classroom;
- through radio dramas and vignettes made vivid by lively action and the generous use of sound effects;
- through careful contextualization, using structures and vocabulary that students have already mastered;

- through the use of pictures and text distributed on worksheets;
- by means of drawings and written material that the classroom teacher puts on the blackboard.

Children in RLAP classrooms develop their understanding of English grammar through inference. They perform a very wide variety of exercises that require them to manipulate grammatical elements; but explicit grammatical explanation is avoided entirely.

RLAP radio lessons never use translation exercises. Occasionally the classroom teacher is asked during a broadcast to provide a translation of a work or phrase into mother tongue for the class, but learners are never asked to provide translations themselves.

Patterned oral drills are used regularly but sparingly in RLAP lessons. Patterned drilling is used when two considerations taken together—the pattern under study, and the limits of conducting language practice over the radio—make it evident that drilling is the most effective way to proceed. In RLAP broadcasts, pattern drills are used only after it can be safely assumed that learners have grasped the meaning of the pattern at hand. Drills are conducted in contexts designed to insure that students do not lose sight of appropriate uses for the pattern in actual conversation.

Children in RLAP classrooms get a great deal of listening and speaking practice, early in the first year, before they begin reading and writing. Since RLAP lessons are radio broadcasts—since the broadcasts themselves have no visual component—learners in RLAP classrooms acquire their first few words of English by two radio techniques: physical actions modeled by the classroom teacher in response to simple commands such as "stand up", "sit down"; and by forging associations between sound effects and simple English words and phrases. Within a few weeks, learners begin to acquire language by associating new words and phrases with various objects and actions in the classroom.

Reading and writing practice begin in the RLAP curriculum near the end of the first year, with material that students have already thoroughly mastered orally.

As RLAP pupils progress through the second and third years, the gap between the introduction of an item orally and its introduction in reading narrows until, about one-third of the way through year three, new items can be introduced through reading without prior listening/speaking exposure.

Much discourse in RLAP classrooms takes the form of question-and-answer exchanges between learners and the radio. As learning progresses, other, more varied modes of discourse are used increasingly. By the middle of the third year, longer conversational exchanges among learners, and between learners and radio voices, are common. An array of other devices for modeling and practicing conversation—dramatic readings, for example, in which learners and radio voices participate together—are also being used regularly.

RLAP broadcasts use several devices for eliciting responses from individual learners, including a system for cueing the classroom teacher to call on a single child, and a system by means of which radio voices address individual children by predesignated names, engaging them as participants in conversations or vignettes. A majority of RLAP learner responses, however, are choral, even when the response is not absolutely predictable, since in large classrooms, steady cadences of choral responses help hold children's attention and ensure that active learning opportunities are distributed evenly.

The RLAP curriculum is organized by means of a "functional-notional" syllabus. A functional-notional syllabus is a system for organizing a course of language study into semantic clusters of structures and vocabulary items. Vocabulary and structures are arranged in ideational groups—ways of expressing propositions, descriptive statements, attitudes, and so forth, regarding some single subject or topic. This way of arranging material for study is in keeping with current trends towards thorough contextualization in language study. It satisfies several case-specific RLAP requirements as well. RLAP radio lessons make liberal use of dramatized material, and the RLAP functional-notional groupings make useful starting points for script development. In addition, RLAP broadcasts use a segmented program format, and the functional-notional arrangment of instructional items lends itself to clear, convenient segmentation.

The segmented format of RLAP broadcasts is one of its distinctive features. Each day's lesson is divided into segments between one and eight minutes long. Each adjacent segment is devoted to a different kind of activity—oral practice, reading and writing, or an enhancement activity such as a song or game. The instructional purpose of this kind of segmentation is adherence to distributed learning, the principle that spreading instruction over time increases initial learning and retention. In broadcasting terms, the segmented format is a scripting formula that helps achieve lively, varied, listenable programming.

The most distinctive methodological feature of RLAP radio lessons is their relentlessly interactive structure. There is a pause for learner response in RLAP broadcasts on an average of once every eleven seconds. More than twenty or thirty seconds seldom elapse without a pause for learner response. Each half-hour broadcast has about one-hundred fifty pauses. Listeners unfamiliar with the broadcasts are often perplexed by this barrage of pauses. Steady rounds of spoken interaction are, of course, a distinguishing feature of any good language class. Listeners who hear an RLAP broadcast outside of a participating classroom are hearing less than half of the lesson. A classroom where an RLAP broadcast lesson is in use is a pleasantly lively place. For a steady, high-energy half hour, children interact intensely with the radio and each other, asking and answering questions, engaging in spoken conversations, exercises, and drills, singing songs, moving about the room performing learning tasks and games, and carrying out reading and writing exercises.

Summary

RLAP's methodology, can aptly be called the interactive radio method, in view of the most salient and distinctive single feature of RLAP broadcasts.

The most important organizational characteristics of RLAP methodology are adherence to distributed-learning principles in instructional design, and the use of a semantically-based functional-notional syllabus to organize the elements of instruction.

The RLAP series of radio lessons adheres in general to direct-method principles of language teaching. Post-audiolingual techniques, in particular cognitively-grounded pattern exercises, are used where they are appropriate and in cases where the limits of instructional broadcasting appear to justify their use.

RLAP is oriented philosophically to generative-transformational language theory. From the inception of the project, we have derived from this basic orientation our judgements of techniques and materials under consideration for use in RLAP broadcasts. Such judgements have also been governed by our role as instructional broadcasters, and our estimation of the potential effectiveness of the various methodologies in current use as tools for teaching English by radio.

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